Panel Session: Towards a policy for medium of instruction and languages for education in multilingual Nepal

Language occupies a central role in human communication, activity, and identity. Policy formulation to address inclusive language use in and for education is therefore deemed crucial, especially in diverse contexts. Nepal has been characterized by complex linguistic diversity comprising 123 mother tongues (MTs) of four language families.

Taking cognizance of the fact that MT plays a significant role in better learning and quality education, Nepal has adopted Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy at the basic education level since the restoration of democracy in 1990. However, implementation has been uneven and it will be important to extend the approach to achieve equity, social inclusion, and quality education. To support this process, a study exploring “Medium of Instruction and Languages for Education” (MILE) was undertaken in 2015. This will inform drafting of a policy for language in education at a time when the new Constitution of Nepal (2016) is awaiting its implementation with necessary fresh enactments. The study combined field research, desk analysis, and extensive stakeholder consultation, focusing on the implications of sociolinguistic, cultural, political, economic, and pedagogical factors.

This panel will discuss the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the MILE study, focusing on areas that have parallels with other countries of Asia. The panel consists of the following four presentations:

**MILE: introduction and background**

**By Yogendra P. Yadava**

This presentation will introduce the study in the context of the evolution of language-in-education constitutional provisions, legislation, and policy in Nepal to date. It will then present the complex sociolinguistic context of Nepal, highlighting the implications for language policy development.

**Successful projects; weak synergies? Achievements and challenges in implementation of MTB-MLE to date**

**By Sadananda Kadel**

This presentation will discuss the study findings regarding the implementation of MTB-MLE policies over the past decade, in particular with regards to a range of pilot programs that focused on use of MTs other than Nepali, and the teaching of Nepali as a second language. It is shown how, whilst many of these made positive impact on children’s learning, weaknesses in the wider policy and governance contexts have hampered full acceptance and wider adoption of MTB-MLE.
A road map for change? Implications, conclusions, and recommendations

By Amanda Seel

This presentation discusses ways forward. It is recommended that the use of a typology of school/community contexts, taking into account both linguistic and capacity factors, should guide appropriate identification of the language(s) to be taught as MTs and as the “language for learning to read”. Guidelines to support MILE policy should be revised and expanded to include specifications on MTs, Nepali, and English, and how these languages should be sequenced and may be used as MoIs or subjects. Ways of raising the quality and status of English as a subject, provision for the inclusion of heritage and religious languages, and strengthening curriculum and teacher development are also explored. A further key recommendation of the MILE study was to develop an integrated comprehensive strategy for participatory dialogue, consultation, and advocacy regarding questions of language in education.